

Live and Learn

Fall 2010

The Newsletter of the PEI Literacy Alliance

Congratulations to Trout River



Crystal Matheson of Trout River Industries receives the *2010 Council of the Federation Literacy Award* from PEI Premier Robert Ghiz. The award celebrates outstanding achievement, innovative practice and excellence in literacy.

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The Newsletter of the PEI Literacy Alliance

Published by the PEI Literacy Alliance.

Edited, written and designed by Catherine O'Bryan, Norman Finlayson and Jinny Greaves.

We would like to hear from you if you have:

- learners' stories
- creative writing by learners
- articles or news about teaching adults
- upcoming events
- new resources for adult education

Please send your material to:

Live and Learn
PEI Literacy Alliance
PO Box 20107
Charlottetown, PE
C1A 9E3

Phone: (902) 368-3620

Fax: (902) 368-3269

E-mail: literacy@eastlink.ca

Web site: www.pei.literacy.ca



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Literacy Grants Awarded

The Charlottetown Rotary Literacy Foundation presented \$1000 grants to five non-profit organizations on September 13. Here is a list of the winners and what their grants will support:

AIDS PEI Community Support Group Inc. will host and facilitate client-led workshops designed to enhance health literacy.

Community Legal Information Association of PEI will distribute and promote a plain language resource titled "Aboriginal Safety Plan". This includes information sessions with the target population.

PEI Volunteers for Literacy will train staff and volunteer tutors to improve services to learners.

Workplace Learning PEI Inc. will increase literacy and essential skills awareness within the business community with the purchase of two portable backdrops.

PEI People First will host a workshop called Knowing Your Rights: A Guide to the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

Each year the Foundation distributes about \$5000 to local groups for literacy projects. The Alliance is also awarding grants this year – please see the back page.

Meet Our New Alliance Board Members



Colette Arsenault

Colette Arsenault, is the Literacy and Community Development Coordinator at the Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É.

She is responsible for adult basic education as well as training services for community organizations and businesses. Previously, Colette worked for 10 years as the director of l'Association des femmes acadiennes et francophones de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, now incorporated under Actions Femmes Î.-P.-É.

Two of Colette's many accomplishments are:

- The publication of an information booklet entitled *Une bonne relation c'est quoi?/ What is a Healthy Relationship?* for victims of family violence
- The idea for of a DVD/Video cassette and booklet: *Je peux le faire! I can do it!* to bring awareness to women about entrepreneurship. It points to other options that can help them be in control of their lives and develop their own independence and financial security.

Karyn Noble, Canadian Union of Public Employees

Karyn has worked for the past 18 years as an Educational Assistant for the Western School Board.

She has been a member of CUPE's National Literacy Working Group since 2005. She is passionate about promoting Workplace Literacy and Clear Language to Union members.

Karyn and her husband have enjoyed operating Noble House, a Bed and Breakfast in a restored circa 1860 farmhouse in Malpeque, PEI, for the past 10 years.



Karyn Noble

Literacy and Essential Skills

It's Time to Reboot Education for Adults with Low Literacy Skills

- from a report by Judith Maxwell. The author argues that Canada is turning a blind eye to the low literacy skills of nine million adults of working age and, in doing so, is jeopardizing future economic growth and social stability.

Canada is turning a blind eye to the low literacy skills of nine million working age adults. In doing so, it is putting future economic growth and social cohesion at serious risk. Few adults are using the literacy programs now on offer and, if more were to apply, there would be no room to accommodate them. So the literacy “market” does not function well – both demand and supply are well below what is needed to keep the economy humming and give every adult a chance to live a good life. The economic and social cost of this blindness will hit hard in the next decade when labour force growth will decelerate, selected labour shortages will stall economic growth, and growing inequality in incomes and employment will magnify social exclusion and promote an underclass.

One in three of Canadians aged 26 to 35 and over 40 percent of people aged 36 to 45 have low literacy skills. These people will form the core of the workforce for the next 20 to 40 years. It would be folly to ignore their literacy deficit. Very few Canadians are illiterate, but there are far too many whose reading, writing and numeracy skills are not strong enough to deal with the daily challenges of life in a modern economy: Challenges such as keeping safe in the workplace, managing one's own health, helping the children be successful in school, making appropriate financial decisions, and qualifying for a good, steady job.

The Canadian Council on Learning is projecting that the number of working age adults with low literacy skills will remain at about nine million in 2031, when they will account for roughly 40 percent of the

working age population. Clearly, we are stuck in a rut – a low-productivity rut. Why?

About 25 percent of the high school students graduating each year will not have adequate literacy skills. Another 10 percent of high school students, on average, will not graduate. The influx of immigrants who were educated in another language means there is a growing population with literacy limitations in English or French. Adults tend to lose their literacy skills if they are not being used regularly.

Among the six million English-speaking adults with low literacy skills, over half were born in Canada, more than half are under 45 years of age and 70 percent are employed. For the two million French-speaking adults with low skills, most are over 45 years of age and almost all were born in Canada. Most say that their reading skills are adequate for their current job.

In summary, the problem of low literacy skills is large and it is not going to disappear unless we reboot the learning system for adults with low literacy skills. And these people face serious personal barriers to learning – stigma, fear, inability to navigate the system and poverty.

It takes community programs to engage people on what matters to them, open their eyes to their own capacity to learn, help them gain the self-confidence they need to be able to consider a more formal learning program. Informal learning activities organized locally in response to local needs are therefore the foundational infrastructure for a literacy system. When

literacy and social services organizations work together, they can create a powerful lever for local economic and social development.

But the combination of tenuous financing and growing management complexity has driven many community organizations to the wall and led to the burnout of paid staff as well as volunteers. The end result is that the community networks that underpin informal learning have been eroded.

Clearly, Canadian society and the economy would be much better off if literacy skills were higher. But the people with low skills are trapped in low-wage, low-productivity jobs, and most do not have the leverage to overcome the barriers that block their way forward. In addition, most employers are not motivated to invest in their own workers' skills. And the community organizations that could create the portals to literacy development are themselves marginalized, when they should be regarded as the essential resources for engaging more learners.

The notion that community economic and social development will be the primary lever to strengthen the literacy system is becoming more widely recognized. In recent years, two provinces – Saskatchewan and British Columbia – have offered generous funding to communities that are prepared to build a coalition of local partners to strengthen literacy programming. But in both cases, the governments themselves undermined their own investments. They funded the planning but did not set aside funding for operations. The apparent assumption was that money will be generated by local fundraising – more book sales and golf tournaments. This is clearly a mistake.

Because the federal government defers to the provinces on adult literacy issues, the field is wide open to the provinces. But governments have each gone their own way on literacy programming. The sum

total of their efforts was described by the OECD in 2006 as “inadequate.” In coming years, the federal government can reinforce provincial efforts by taking responsibility for financing provincial literacy programs for Aboriginals and immigrants, since both groups are in federal jurisdiction.

The good news is that many provinces are now in the process of enhancing their literacy programs. Alberta has just set an ambitious goal: to raise the share of Albertans with Level 3 skills or higher by 10 percentage points to 70 percent by 2020. The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training also released a literacy plan in the fall of 2009; Manitoba and New Brunswick are working on a strategy; and Ontario is redesigning its curriculum.

Meanwhile, the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada is in the early stages of developing a Literacy Action Plan designed to foster more information-sharing across provinces and strengthen the knowledge base about what works.

If we remain blind to Canada's literacy deficit, we will miss the opportunity to improve economic growth, productivity and the quality of life of millions of Canadians. Let's take off the blinders and get on with the job.

To read the whole article by Judith Maxwell follow this link: http://www.nald.ca/library/research/time_reboot/time_reboot.pdf



Nilhambri Ghai and our Vice chair Lori Johnston

PEI Literacy Alliance AGM

On September 8, International Literacy Day, the Alliance hosted its annual general meeting at the Delta Hotel.

Board members, guests and representatives from member organizations enjoyed a presentation from Nilhambri Ghai of the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills.

Henk van Leeuwen, Executive Director of the PEI Cultural Human Resources Sector Council spoke about the links between culture, literacy and essential skills.

2010 Summer Tutoring Program for Kids

Our summer program was a success with over 800 children tutored in French and English.

We hired 25 university and high school students to work with each child one hour a week for eight weeks during July and August.

All primary and elementary schools referred students to the program to help them maintain and improve their literacy skills. The reports from the students, parents and resource teachers were positive regarding the effects of the program.

This year the program received sponsorship from Service Canada, all the school boards, the Department of Education and the Charlottetown Royalty Rotary Club.



Children from West Royalty School

Guardian photo by Jim Day

Literacy and Essential Skills

Essential Skills for Annual Meetings



Essential Skill:	Used to:
Reading Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read invitation and newspaper ad • Read annual report
Document Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill out election ballot • Interpret essential skills display
Numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review statement of revenue and expenses
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record minutes of meeting
Oral Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information with other members • Present reports
Working with Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in discussions
Thinking Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think critically and make decisions effectively
Computer Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type up meeting notes
Continuous Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn new information from the guest speaker

The Back Page

Raise a Reader Day, September 29



Kay Docherty from the Guardian joins Norm Finlayson of the Alliance collecting donations. The "street money" raised this year was \$9800. Photo courtesy of The Guardian.

Recognizing Life's Work: Helping Adult Learners Connect their Essential Skills from Home to Work

On November 29th the PEI Literacy Alliance is hosting a workshop to explore a new resource for adults.

The goal of the project is to provide credibility, validity and recognition to the essential skills that adults develop and strengthen through daily home and life activities. It will help adult learners with little or no work experience realize they still have a wealth of knowledge, skills and experience to bring to the workplace.

This ½ day workshop is suited for adult educators, employment counselors and people working with adults looking for employment.

For more information call 368-3620

Literacy Grants Available

Please visit our website www.pei.literacy.ca for details and an application form. The deadline for applications is December 1, 2010.

Family Literacy Day

The next Family Literacy day celebration will be noon to 3:00 pm on Saturday January 22 at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery. Come join us for family activities including celebrity readers, music, puppet shows, giveaways and snacks.

Announcement

The PEI Literacy Alliance has made a directory of learning resources and private schools in PEI. You will find it posted on our website at www.pei.literacy.ca

Spotlight on Change is an essential skills upgrading program for women over 40. To learn more about this curriculum attend our presentation on Friday November 12 from 1:30-3:30 at the Delta Hotel, Charlottetown. There is no charge. To register call 368-3620.

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